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Spying Rivals Keep Watch on One Another

Interservice rivalry was supposed to end with the creation of the Defense Department after World War II. It didn't, of course: the costly duplication, petty jealousies and Byzantine empire-building continue to this day, particularly during the perennial battle of the budget.

It's the same in the secret world of spies and counterspies. The misnamed Central Intelligence Agency was intended to bring all the government's clandestine activities into one happy family. But it hasn't worked out that way.

There are a dozen U.S. intelligence agencies, supposedly watched over by the CIA but actually determinedly guarding their own special turf. They spend an inordinate amount of time and effort keeping watch on their rival spy agencies, and thanks to "double agents" of divided agency loyalty, they generally succeed.

A top-secret White House report shown to my associate Dale Van Atta cited an example of this. The attorney general's office once formed a small, supersecret group to investigate the National Security Agency.

The investigation remained secret

for one week. When an NSA employee was called to testify, he was sworn to absolute secrecy. But the witness, or someone in NSA whom he told, leaked word of the investigation to a buddy in Treasury intelligence. And within a week the news reached the CIA leadership.

One former National Security Council official told me that the State Department's intelligence bureau once raised hell about requests for its most secret documents by the CIA. What bugged the State Department was that the requests referred to the documents by number. State accused the NSC of passing the reference numbers to the CIA.

A decade ago, a Navy yeoman assigned to the National Security Council was suspected of giving me top-secret NSC documents. The investigation proved that he was indeed a spy—for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

More recently, a government investigation of former CIA agents Frank Terpil and Ed Wilson, who supplied explosives and expertise to the Libyans, disclosed that at least one of their recruits went to Libya to report on the operation for military intelligence.

The double undercover agent, Luke Floyd Thompson, a Green Beret who had once worked for the CIA, was contacted by a CIA case officer and asked to form a team to go to Libya. He immediately notified

the military intelligence office at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Military agents were sent to the man's home. He was instructed to keep them informed of the progress of what they believed to be a CIA operation. He was subsequently informed by a contact that it was indeed a CIA operation, but Wilson shipped him out of the country before he could report this to Fort Bragg.

The Green Beret stayed in Libya only a month, and was extensively debriefed by military intelligence when he returned. He was ordered to continue his "surveillance" of the supposed CIA operation. He shipped the Libyans training manuals, boots and other equipment, all of it duly logged by his Fort Bragg contact. To this day, he doesn't know what the military did with this information, or whether the Terpil-Wilson operation was even partially the work of the CIA.

In all this internecine espionage, there are two agencies that stick together and help the other fend off "outsiders." They are the CIA and naval intelligence. This is apparently because of the Navy's historical dominance in U.S. intelligence gathering and the frequent appointment of admirals to high posts in the CIA. At any rate, the two agencies often trade favors. This buddy-buddy relationship drives our other intelligence agencies wild.